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## CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

### THE GOD-PROBLEM.—CRITICISM OF AN AGNOSTIC, WITH AN EDITORIAL REPLY.

#### IS DR. CARUS A THEIST?

Dr. Carus recently lectured before the Philosophical Club of the University of Chicago, and on another occasion before the Philosophical Club of the University of Ann Arbor, on "God." This lecture is published in the October *Monist*, of which it forms the most attractive feature.

Even from the standpoint of the Atheist, Dr. Carus opines, "the God-idea remains the most important thought in the history of the world." "It is neither irrelevant nor an aberration, but contains the most important, the deepest and most comprehensive, philosophically the most explanatory, and practically the most applicable truth of all truths." And then Dr. Carus vehemently assails the Agnostic position as he conceives it :

"Agnosticism . . . as a bankruptcy of thought, is not only the weakest, but also the most injurious, philosophy. It is the philosophy of indolence, which, on account of its own insolvency, declares that the most vital questions of man's life, the questions of the soul, the soul's relation to the body, the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, the creation, and the ultimate purpose of being, are beyond the reach of reason."

Especially Dr. Carus discovers a rock of offence in such a "glittering phrase" as "the finite cannot comprehend the infinite." Is Dr. Carus able to "comprehend" infinite space? Apply mathematics to that conception; no reasoning from "mathematical lines" and "mechanical contrivances" will assist such comprehension: we may apprehend what we do not comprehend.

Dr. Carus affirms that there are but two kinds of Agnosticism—"the pious Agnosticism of him who would not allow the light of science to shine upon the problems of religion; and the infidel Agnosticism of the scoffer, who argues that, knowledge on matters of religion being unattainable, we ought to leave religion alone." The latter proposition is offensively worded and loosely phrased. What is "infidel Agnosticism"? Infidel implies "faithless"; does Dr. Carus mean that the "scof-

fer" is "infidel" to Agnosticism? But should such "scoffer" argue that "knowledge of matters of religion [is] unobtainable," that is a faith. To what, then, is even the "scoffer" faithless? The orthodox Christian Theist might describe Dr. Carus's position as "infidel Theism," and we should anticipate an exposure of such misuse of words. "Christian Agnosticism" is an oblique compliment to Agnosticism; "infidel Agnosticism" an illogical offence.

"While even the Atheist's denial will be helpful,"—not *may*, be it noted, but *will*—"the Agnostic position is neither theoretically valid nor practicable, for it leaves all opinions, be they scientific, superstitious, or mere guesswork, on the same level of equal incommensurability." Exactly what is meant by "equal incommensurability" in this connexion is, for us, mere "guesswork." We have a "superstitious" conviction that Dr. Carus is devoutly sincere, but not infallible; that in his aggressive bias against Agnosticism he is not always lucid, any more than discriminating.

We have noted his generous acceptance of the "help" of the "Atheist's denial." Here again he errs. We have not understood "Atheism" to imply absolute denial, but rather as a suspensive negation of theological affirmations. Assuming that "Atheists"—or those who think they are "Atheists"—are committed to denial, "Atheism" has no place in philosophy except as an unphilosophical reliance on borrowing intellectual capital from, and trading on the name of, a non-existent rich relation.

But the god of Carusian Monism is either reaching a loftier height of poetical and ethical ideal, or is emerging from philosophical abstraction into definite affirmation, and is by means of a human soul, whose noble sincerity is indisputable, revealing himself to man through editorial expositions in *The Monist*. Lord Herbert of Cherbury claimed a revelation from God to publish a refutation of a respectably venerable "revelation." Our suggestion should be obvious.

This is what Dr. Carus publishes to the world :

"God is, further, not an indifferent being to us. He has a personal and private relation to all his creatures, being nearer to every one of them than the beating of their hearts and the neural vibration of their brains. He is in them, and yet different to them, and infinitely high above them. He is their life, their home, whence they start, and the goal whither they travel. God is not like us, but we are like him. He is the light of our life. He is the mariner's compass which guides us, and the anchor of hope on which we rely. Unless we feel his presence, we shall find no peace in the restlessness of this world. Unless we sanctify our lives by the purport which his existence imparts to all life, we can find no comfort in our afflictions. Unless we recognise that our soul is an actualisation of his eternal thoughts, we shall not learn to fight the right way in the struggle for existence. Unless we listen to the still, small voice that teaches us our duties, we shall not obtain that blissful assurance which the childship of God alone can afford."

This certainty of utterance seems to be inspired by a new conviction. Such new conviction may command our remote admiration if explicitly avowed. Of absolute sincerity in any conviction there is no question. We do not allude to

"abstractions as being empty," nor is Dr. Carus in appeal or rebuke to Agnostics in any sense to be compared to a "missionary" addressing "Zulus, or, in our midst . . . a Salvationist meeting."

To one querist—in what is alluded to as a "lively discussion" at the Chicago Club—who asked if Dr. Carus did "not explain too much," it was counter-queried: "Is it possible to explain too much?" In answer to another question, Dr. Carus alleged that his conception of God "was not only compatible with the Christian conception; it is the Christian conception itself, in its matured and purified form." We ask for more explanation. "Is it possible to explain too much?"

We yield to none in admiration of the splendid and catholic spirit, the lofty ethical inspiration, the oftentimes exactitude of philosophical thought and definition, that we associate with the attractive personality of Dr. Carus. His persistent misconceptions of Agnosticism we have willingly—although regretfully—attributed to unconscious bias, in degree of rebellion against dogmatic delimitation of the knowable. Time was when he appeared as the apostle of science in denial of knowledge other than physical science can yield. And we who have—on this side of the Atlantic—through many years acclaimed his work, despite his petulant upbraiding of Agnosticism, have now the right to ask for "light, more light." Have the "Philosophy of Science," the "Science of Religion and the Religion of Science," evolved a coherent Theistic belief? If not, is it inconceivable that Theists may reasonably assume that the editor of *The Monist* has a god-knowledge he is able to announce. "Is it possible to explain too much?"

AMOS WATERS in *The Literary Guide*.

#### IN REPLY TO MR. AMOS WATERS.

Being always anxious to have his views pass through the furnace of criticism, the editor of *The Monist* has republished from *The Literary Guide* of London, England, Mr. Amos Waters's friendly but energetic protest against his "vehemently assailing the Agnostic position." In reply we make the following comments:

I am loath to reopen the debate on Agnosticism, and repeat here only that there are many kinds of Agnosticism. On some other occasion I expressed my approval of the Agnosticism of modesty, which is a suspension of judgment so long as there are not adequate grounds to be had for forming an opinion. But the Agnosticism of modesty is a personal attitude, not a doctrine. As soon as it is changed into a doctrine it becomes the Agnosticism of arrogance. By Agnosticism of arrogance I understand the theory that the main problems of life (viz., concerning the existence or non-existence of God and of the soul, as to the immortality of the soul, and the relation of the soul to the body, as to the origin of life, the nature and authority of morals, etc., etc.,) are not within the ken of human comprehension. There is no need of entering now into details, as I have discussed the subject time and again and there is no need of repeating myself.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See *Homilies of Science*, pp. 213 ff.; *The Open Court* No. 212., *Fundamental Problems*, pp. 154 ff.; and *Primer of Philosophy*, *passim*.